



News Release

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Contacts: [Kelly Stowe](#), Communications Office
[Marqise Allen](#), Communications Office

360-236-4022
360-236-4072

Kindergarten immunization rate drops slightly in Washington

Health officials urge parents to vaccinate their kids against preventable diseases

OLYMPIA — For the 2013-2014 school year, 83.3 percent of Washington kindergarteners had all the vaccines required for school entry—a 2.2 percent decrease from the previous school year.

Although most kindergarteners came to school vaccinated and protected from preventable diseases, the slight decline in fully immunized kids is a concern to state health officials.

“Parents need to ensure their kids are vaccinated to keep them safe,” said Secretary of Health John Wiesman.

It’s unclear why immunization coverage rate dropped, as rates for the previous two years had steadily increased. The Department of Health is looking at some possible contributing factors, such as how schools determine a student’s immunization status and how they report that information. This will help determine whether the cause is due to a change in the way schools measure data or if there actually are fewer kids meeting the requirements.

The rates for each individual vaccine required for school entry also dropped. Most concerning is drops in the whooping cough and measles vaccine rates—2.1 and 1.9 percent, respectively. Our state declared a whooping cough epidemic in 2012 and had a measles outbreak this year. Both diseases are very serious and can spread quickly in schools and child care centers.

Even though immunizations dropped, exemptions rates for kindergarteners remained at 4.6 percent this school year. This rate covers medical, personal, and religious exemptions. Parents are allowed to get an exemption from vaccine requirements under certain conditions: a medical condition, personal beliefs, religious beliefs, or membership in a religious body that does not allow medical treatment.

State law requires parents to have a health care provider sign the exemption form when a medical, personal, or religious exemption is claimed.

“It’s important for parents to know the consequences when they skip or delay vaccines for their kids,” said Wiesman. “Children who aren’t fully immunized are likely to be excluded from school during an outbreak, they may become seriously ill and risk death, and may get someone sick who’s unable to get vaccinated.”

Washington provides all recommended vaccines at no cost for kids through age 18, available from health care providers across the state. Although providers may charge an office-visit fee and an administration fee for the vaccine, a family that can’t afford to pay can ask that the administration fee be waived.

For help finding a health care provider or an immunization clinic, call your local health agency, visit the [ParentHelp123 resource finder](#), or call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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